Describe the EBSCOhost Integrated Search and EBSCO Discovery Service for those who are not familiar with this new service.

When we speak about “discovery,” we are really talking about the elements that make up EBSCO’s Complete Discovery Solution, which provides users with access to an institution’s entire collection via a single, customizable entry point. The core of this solution is EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS).

EBSCO Discovery Service creates a unified, customized index of an institution’s information resources, and an easy, yet powerful means of accessing all of that content from a single search box. The ability to create these custom solutions is achieved by harvesting metadata from both internal (library) and external (vendors) sources, and creating a preindexed service of unprecedented size and speed. Although the resulting collection is massive in size and scope, the fact that it is indexed directly on EBSCOhost servers allows exceptionally fast search response times and the ability to leverage the familiar powerful features of the EBSCOhost user experience—across all resources.

EDS offers a single interface for discovery of a library’s entire collection and the powerful features to heighten the research experience. EDS provides:

- **Much deeper and wider indexing than any other discovery solution** In addition to the most comprehensive and robust collection of metadata from the best content sources, EDS also provides full indexing for EBSCOhost databases and other partner databases including NewsBank, Readex, LexisNexis, Alexander Street Press, and more.

- **Everything the researcher needs in one place** By leveraging the fast and familiar EBSCOhost platform, EDS offers a single interface for discovery of a library’s entire collection and the powerful features to heighten the research experience.

- **Full-text searching** Not only does EDS search the most inclusive set of metadata, but superior relationships and licenses with academic publishers make EDS the most comprehensive service for searching the complete full text of journal articles and other resources.

- **Fast, simple access to all of the library’s full-text content (electronic and print)** EDS offers a truly integrated one-stop search experience for all of a library’s journals, magazines, books, special collections, OPAC, and more.

EBSCOhost Integrated Search (EHIS), a “next generation” federated search service eliminates the biggest frustrations, usually associated with speed, common in most federated search services. AJAX technology in EHIS displays results in a tiered approach allowing results from the fastest connectors to populate the result list while others come in as they become available. EHIS plays a complementary role in discovery by extending the reach of the discovery solution by incorporating external resources that are not available via any discovery service, without slowing down the discovery search.

Although discovery services may include table of contents and other thin metadata from individual journals and databases, some resources will likely never be fully included in any discovery service. Hence, federation is a necessary component of discovery given that the goal is to bring together all resources in the most inclusive, powerful way. Since EHIS can be seamlessly integrated with EBSCO Discovery Service, users can simply perform a single search query and be presented with one result page that includes a comprehensive list of materials culled from all of their electronic resources. For the end user, the search experience is simple and intuitive yet exceptionally powerful due to the unsurpassed strength of the EBSCOhost search engine.

EBSCO also offers LinkSource (an OpenURL link resolver) and EBSCO A-to-Z (a Web-based listing service), which round out our full suite of discovery resources, although it is worth noting that EBSCO Discovery Service will work with any link resolver.

In the discovery space you are up against stiff competition—OCLC WorldCat Local and SerialsSolutions Summon come immediately to mind. What differentiates this new discovery interface?

Although discovery solutions can be complicated and may be difficult to evaluate, there are really two basic categories to assess: Content and User Experience.

When it comes to content, EBSCO Discovery Service will offer far more full-text searching of academic journals than any other discovery service. In addition, EBSCO Discovery Service will provide far more (and better) indexing from controlled vocabulary than any other discovery service. Together, these two advantages allow for a dramatically superior search experience.

EBSCO is the largest intermediary between publishers and libraries. We offer the most comprehensive collections of information sources, and we are the largest provider of licensed secondary databases for universities. For years EBSCO has been licensing full-text content, heavily indexing and abstracting a myriad of sources, creating databases, loading third-party databases on the EBSCOhost platform, building up the most expansive full-text collections available and providing links that bring full-text results directly to citation searches. Deep indexing and full-text searching are at the root of EBSCOhost databases, and our years of experience in loading third-party databases onto EBSCOhost translates very smoothly to loading OPAC data.

The next logical step was EBSCO Discovery Service—a custom experience leveraging the valuable print and electronic collections of a library and the power and familiarity of the EBSCOhost platform.

The least valuable component of discovery appears to be the one that some services are hanging their hats on: thin metadata (i.e., basic table of contents data) for a very large number of titles. The reality is that this is the easiest, most inexpensive content slice to include, and all discovery services offer this.
The key differentiators for content in discovery services are:

1. The depth and breadth of indexing and abstracts (not just thin metadata), especially indexing from controlled vocabularies; and

2. The ability to search the full text (something that requires rights from publishers). While some other services are claiming to do this, their services are far less comprehensive in this area.

EBSCO is in a perfect position to provide this type of ideal searching. Much in the same way that federated search services failed to provide the “ideal” one-stop search they originally set out to provide, discovery services can have fatal flaws as well. Since the “speed” issue is essentially solved with locally-harvested content in discovery services (although this too differs among discovery services), if the quality of searching diminishes because subject headings and detailed indexing is replaced with thin metadata, discovery solutions fail to bring the ideal experience they are intended to provide. EBSCO has assured that this will not happen with EBSCO Discovery Service. One example related to this is hearing another service claiming to cover “75 percent” of the content in EBSCO’s Academic Search database (“including 99 of the 100 most used journals”). In this instance, they are certainly not providing the database as we know it, but instead likely providing inferior metadata for a number of its sources, but not the subject headings from the Academic Search controlled vocabulary, source types, publications, authors, full text (and ability to search that full text) and other clustering options (facets) that have made Academic Search the most used database in many institutions around the world. Conversely, the rich, full metadata (and full text) from EBSCOhost databases that represent many of the most-used databases in colleges and universities (e.g., Academic Search, Business Source, CINAHL, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Historical Abstracts, SPORTDiscus, etc.) can be part of the EBSCO Discovery Service for customers subscribing to these databases. Further still, because EBSCOhost is the leading platform for critical third-party databases, customers of EBSCO Discovery Service who also subscribe to these databases on EBSCOhost can enable results from these third-party databases to appear as part of the search experience while still keeping their identity as having come from one of these indexes. Libraries find huge value in the depth of indexing in these well-known indexes, and they must be part of the user experience in order to obtain the ideal powerful single search approach to discovery of a library’s entire collection. EBSCO’s Complete Discovery Solution is unique in this way.

The “new” discovery interface is the same interface used in more than a hundred thousand libraries around the world—it is EBSCOhost, the most-used platform for premium research. Leveraging the power of the EBSCOhost platform means that when customers select EBSCO Discovery Service, there is no need for librarians or end users to learn yet another new interface. This will open up additional content to users already familiar with the EBSCOhost interface—no new training for staff and no confusion over one search potentially leading to multiple interfaces and Web sites, etc.

Since discovery is based on the familiar EBSCOhost interface, consistent searching does not end with the result list. While other services launch users into new interfaces or send them to publisher sites right from the initial result list, EBSCO Discovery Service offers a fully-featured experience for users to remain within the structure of EBSCOhost—set limiters and expanders, utilize subject clustering, set up alerts, e-mail, print, export, citations, bookmarkable URLs, persistent links, RSS, and so on. In fact, EBSCOhost features are available for any applicable database, from any vendor including such features as EBSCOhost basic and advanced search, screen functionality, subject clustering (facets), publication clustering (facets), sorting results by relevancy or date, date slider limiter, adding to folders, custom links, fast response times and allowing other results to display as they become available. With EBSCO Discovery Service, EBSCO builds on the strength of the interface to serve the end user throughout his search, not just to find the information based on a simple thin metadata search and then send him off on his own.

Another element that makes EBSCO’s discovery option different is the level of customizability. Our goal is to put the power and control in the hands of the customer, and have the “EBSCO” name take a backseat. As such, with our discovery service, we are offering an unprecedented level of customization to the interface for prominent logo placement, interface colors, naming of the service itself, tool bar customization, and so on—all in such a way that can easily dovetail with other marketing/branding efforts of the site. EBSCO Discovery Service also allows a site to setup widgets (e.g., Library Guides, etc.) directly on the results page, as well as exporting bits of functionality from the EBSCO experience to be used in other sections of a university’s Web site. With these options, the power of EBSCOhost remains but the look and feel of discovery becomes closely associated with the institution’s Web site and identity.

What are the challenges of indexing commercial metadata, for example, indexing that doesn’t originate with EBSCO?

By loading various data from journal partners and database vendors, EBSCO is well prepared for discovery. EBSCO has years of experience dealing with the variety of content within journals and the various databases made available on EBSCOhost—so dealing with data normalization is not an issue. With rich database offerings ranging from engineering to poetry to music, the EBSCOhost platform was built to house data of all kinds. EBSCO has been making data available electronically for two decades and that experience perfectly positions the company to deal with the varying source types and data types that discovery will put forth.

EBSCOhost is the most heavily used platform for leading secondary databases and the rich indexing from those resources can be searched alongside EBSCO Discovery Service to make sure institutions that subscribe to these indexes are able to capitalize on their value within their discovery service. Since EBSCOhost also provides seamless linking to the full text from EBSCOhost databases within search results, discovery users will continue to be able to access full-text articles without losing any of the rich indexing that makes citation databases such a valuable part of a library’s collection.

EBSCO has also partnered with most leading journal publishers and, as a result, EDS offers author-supplied abstracts, author-supplied keywords, and in many cases full text. In addition, database providers are working with EBSCO Discovery Service, such as LexisNexis, NewsBank, Readex, and Alexander Street Press, so there is no need to federate out to these resources—they can be searched via EDS.

Aside from your own metadata and those from primary publishers, do you include metadata from other aggregators such as ProQuest, H.W. Wilson, and Gale Cengage?

There are more than 300 databases available on EBSCOhost, many of which are not produced by EBSCO, such as several from H.W. Wilson as well as dozens of leading databases from organizations including Thomson Reuters, ATLA, CABI Publishing, and many more. We also have partnerships with companies such as LexisNexis, NewsBank, Readex, and Alexander Street Press to work within EBSCO Discovery Service for mutual customers.

Any titles not included in our discovery service that may be indexed in competing databases are likely inconsequential (and certainly not
among the highly-ranked journals) given the comprehensiveness of the list of titles that we process at EBSCO. The main exception is non-journals content from these competing vendors, which can be federated without slowing down discovery.

Just as directly competing aggregators do not supply information to EBSCO, we do not supply information to them. Because the quality and quantity of sources and coverage included in our databases far outweighs the competition, this leaves them at a disadvantage. As mentioned previously, there is a bit of confusion about this because EBSCO’s Academic Search is used as a benchmark for another discovery service that claims they are covering “75 percent” or even “99 percent” of Academic Search. Of course, Academic Search itself is not provided for them to harvest, which leads instead to less-than-adequate thin metadata for their “coverage.”

In limited instances competing database vendors offer valuable resources that should be included as part of a discovery service, but are not part of EBSCO Discovery Service (such as dissertation products). It is for these instances that EBSCO offers the seamless inclusion of EBSCOhost Integrated Search— to federate these resources as part of the discovery experience.

Are there any large primary publishers who are withholding metadata? What about Elsevier?

EBSCO has a relationship with Elsevier such that author-supplied abstracts and author keywords for 1,800 Elsevier Science journals are included in EBSCO Discovery Service. In addition, Elsevier journals also include indexing from controlled vocabularies from any EBSCOhost database subscriptions available to each EBSCO Discovery Service customer. (As a related aside, EBSCO just acquired the Elsevier database, World Textiles, which will become part of EBSCO Discovery Service for customers who subscribe to the database on EBSCOhost.)

Must a library maintain subscriptions to indexing and abstracting services covered through this interface?

We are concerned that an incredibly false impression is being created that discovery services will replace these powerful, important indexes. We do not believe that thin metadata and highly limited full text represents an acceptable substitute for thorough, robust indexing and abstracts.

To answer the question directly, yes, libraries must maintain subscriptions to indexing and abstracting services, because discovery services are certainly not a viable replacement. If you look at the EBSCO Discovery Service, it is highly customized for each library to take advantage of its database subscriptions. Because many of these A&I databases are available on EBSCOhost, the results can be displayed along with EDS results. For example, if you subscribe to CINAHL (the leading index for nursing and allied health), your EBSCO Discovery Service would have the renowned CINAHL headings and detailed indexing included in the discovery experience to heighten the value for those searching for nursing content. If you are not a subscriber to CINAHL, the level of detail that is only available in this database is not included in your discovery experience. Only EBSCO Discovery Service has the means to bring together a discovery solution with these critical indexes for those subscribing to these databases on the EBSCOhost platform—and only EBSCO enable seamless SmartLinks to the full text. Libraries see immense value and spend thousands of dollars each year on these indexes. These same librarians are realizing that in order to have “power” in a discovery solution, they need to figure out a way to search these indexes along with other content in their discovery service.

How do you assure customers of the quality and completeness of the unified index used in discovery?

A huge advantage for EDS is that the content associated with it is customized for each library so that libraries can extend the reach of discovery to maximize the value of their collection. The more content a library has available, the more robust its discovery solution. Combining EBSCOhost resources with OPACs is the essence of discovery and it will be different for every institution. Although EBSCO Discovery Service harvests metadata from tens of thousands of magazines and journals, millions of books, newspapers and other databases from a number of providers, book enhancement data from Baker and Taylor, local institutional repositories, etc., there is no pre-set unified discovery index. Instead, there are custom discovery experiences designed specifically for each customer to expose all of their library’s available content to the end user.

It’s no secret that Google Search motivates a library to seek services like yours. Is the Google index exposed to your search and discovery?

If the question is, do we include Google as part of EBSCO Discovery Service, the answer is no. EBSCOhost, however, does allow libraries to set up custom links to Google or to add links from Google to its link resolver menu. A library can also use widgets to drop any search box into EDS including a Google or Google Scholar link.

The question does bring up an interesting differentiator between search engines and discovery solutions. Google searches the surface Web while discovery services search a library’s collection of premium content (i.e., information not available free online). The way people use the Web was a major reason we redesigned the EBSCOhost interface in 2008. Users have come to expect certain functionality, and that EBSCOhost has incorporated that functionality and those improvements are a major reason we are positioned to provide libraries with discovery. EBSCO Discovery Service brings together the ease of one-stop, all-inclusive searching that Google provides with premium resources that librarians painstakingly select for their collections—enabling the best of both worlds for end users.

Do you ever see your index exposed to Google or Google Scholar?

EBSCOhost Connection is how EBSCOhost results are opened to search engines. Through EBSCOhost Connection, EBSCO has exposed limited data to Google in order to have EBSCOhost results appear within Google results. Our goal, however, is to drive Google users to their local libraries. EBSCOhost Connection is a bridge between search engines and libraries. EBSCO is working with Google and publisher partners to expand the visibility of EBSCOhost and library resources in this way.

Right now libraries can set up Google Scholar and use it to gain access to EBSCOhost using link resolvers within a university’s profile.

Federated search usually preserves a link to the remote database it is connecting to so that a user can take advantage of the advanced features of that database. Is native search preserved in Integrated Search and Discovery?

Users are able to access native interfaces. However, in the interest of usability and a full research experience, EBSCOhost Integrated Search does not force the user off to the native interface abruptly. Users are able to view citations, add items to folders, see abstracts and subject headings without ever leaving the EBSCOhost user interface. Once he is certain he is interested in an item, he can click on the Retrieve Item link and he will be brought to the native interface.
Incorporating services such as EBSCO Discovery Service (which includes content from most major primary publishers and some secondary publishers), EBSCOhost database subscriptions (which include most major secondary publishers) and EBSCOhost Integrated Search (which includes nearly all remaining publishers) allows the library to level the playing field when the goal is to expose a library’s full collection to end users. Publishers benefit from increased usage, and electronic and print content from e-journals, databases, e-books, historical digital archives and print collections are made available to users from one starting point. If that starting point is a user-friendly, intuitive search system then you have improved the user experience from the moment he sits down at the computer to the moment he finds what he is looking for. In this way, none of these elements suffer disintermediation, and the end user is able to discover the valuable resources a library has to offer. It’s a win-win situation.

What are the cost versus value dynamics of Integrated Search and Discovery? What is the return on investment especially in this economy?

Libraries have long sought the experience that federated search promised but did not deliver. Discovery maximizes the value of all of the collections a library has worked so hard to create. EBSCO Discovery Service extracts the value of these collections and exposes the content (both print and electronic) to more users in a way that makes it easier to find what the end user is looking for. Again, journals, databases and OPACs are exposed to searchers who are now beginning their searches from a library search box rather than a particular database or the library catalog. For a library, it is one thing to know the value of one’s collection and up until now it was another thing to see that value being realized through usage. Discovery allows libraries to put their collections in the hands of users and benefit from the increased exposure. In relation to the costs that have gone into building and maintaining the library collection, the discovery element is extremely low priced and at the same time adds immense value.

Can you provide some idea about your pricing algorithm for this new service?

As with EBSCOhost databases, pricing for EBSCO Discovery Service and EBSCOhost Integrated Search is based on a number of factors, including the size of an institution (FTE or population served). EDS uses an add-on module approach to provide services such as enhanced book data, institutional repositories, an A to Z listing service, and a link resolver, etc., as needed. EHIS pricing is based on the number and availability of connectors to non-EDS non-EBSCOhost resources. Any institution can receive a price within one week if they can answer a few questions for us.